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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the implementation of a formative evaluation plan developed by nine educators (seven teachers and two administrators) in Richland School District Two (Columbia, South Carolina). Experienced high school teachers set improvement goals for themselves and met with evaluators or peers throughout the year to discuss progress and possible strategies. Following a training session conducted by the development team that included information about formative evaluation, ways to conference with peers, and how to videotape a classroom lesson, the teachers selected an area of professional growth that was observable in the classroom, and taught a lesson while being videotaped or observed by a colleague. Prior to the observation, the two teachers conferred confidentially about the lesson's focus. Subsequent to the observation, they met again to discuss what had taken place and to determine how the teacher could improve. Teachers and administrators stated that there were a few minor problems associated with implementation of this plan, but overall, the teachers found positive effects including an increased sense of professionalism, new relationships with colleagues, a more reflective view of teaching, new leadership roles, and improved classroom instruction. (LL)

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COLLABORATION AT RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT TWO:

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

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COLLABORATION AT RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT TWO: TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Most classroom teachers in the United States are evaluated on a summative evaluation instrument. Typically, an administrator or outside evaluator observes a teacher several times during the year and then meets with him or her to discuss what was observed. At the end of the school year, the teacher is rated in various areas related to teaching. This type of teacher evaluation, summative evaluation, is a tool for accountability; it's a tool for checking for teacher competence (Barber, 1985).

The other type of teacher evaluation, one that is growing in popularity, is formative evaluation. Formative evaluation promotes growth in teachers and usually involves teachers setting improvement goals for themselves (Barber, 1985). Teachers meet with evaluators or peers throughout the year to discuss progress and possible strategies. With this evaluation method, the teacher is "in charge" of the process. It is primarily being used as an evaluation tool for experienced teachers -- teachers who have proven themselves competent and are ready to set their own professional goals.

Educators from Richland School District Two (Columbia, South Carolina) developed a formative evaluation plan for experienced high school teachers in 1991 because of their frustration with their summative plan. An assistant principal reported that the paperwork and time required to do the evaluations on the summative

teacher evaluation system had overwhelmed administrators. The principal of the school said teachers were unhappy with the summative evaluation instrument. Teachers described their dissatisfaction:

- "The evaluator had no expertise in my subject area. "I was not going to tell an administrator my weaknesses."
- "I don't think you can fully judge teaching abilities by putting teachers in uncomfortable situations on two different days."
- "The old evaluation did nothing to improve my work in my subject area."

Because South Carolina state legislation allowed school districts to use locally developed evaluation plans for experienced teachers, a Richland Two central office administrator looked for some alternative formative models. Being an advocate for teachers and administrators, she was aware of the shortcomings of the district's summative instrument for experienced teachers. She discovered that the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) education laboratory was offering formative teacher evaluation training.

Nine educators from Richland School District Two attended formative teacher evaluation training sponsored by SERVE in Fall 1991. At that training, educators learned more about formative teacher evaluation methods. When the seven teacher and two administrators returned home, they began to meet on a regular basis to design a formative teacher evaluation plan for high school teachers.

The development team decided that the formative evaluation plan would be voluntary for experienced teachers. That is, experienced teachers could choose to stay with the summative model or try the new formative plan. To participate in the formative plan, teachers had to attend a training session conducted by the development team that included information about summative and formative evaluation, ways to conference with peers, and how to videotape a classroom lesson.

The Richland Two plan consisted of teachers selecting an area of professional growth that was observable in the classroom and teaching a lesson while being videotaped or observed by a colleague. Prior to the observation, the two teachers conferred about the lesson's focus; after the observation they met again to discuss what had taken place and how the teacher could improve (Robbins, 1991). The colleague held the information "exchanged" in confidence. That is, no report of the feedback was given to the principal. At all times, teacher being reviewed was in charge of the process. At the end of the school year, teachers signed a form stating that they had completed the evaluation process.

Tenured teachers who choose the formative option are on a three-year evaluation cycle. In 1992-93, out of 24 experienced teachers at Richland Northeast High School who were up for evaluation, 20 chose the formative evaluation plan.

Unique features of the formative plan included teachers being able to choose their own area of focus and being able to work with

a peer. Teachers stated the positive effects of the formative plan:

- "We (teachers) are less intimidated, thus more natural. We can improve form input and view the instrument as constructive criticism."

- "There seems to be less stress and a greater degree of cooperation among colleagues."

- "We (teachers) are in control and like it that way. Teachers are better able to evaluate themselves."

- "I feel more professional and in charge of my own evaluation - less like I was performing to please someone else. I can focus critically on my own teaching and choose what I want to work on. Very empowering!"

- "It has given me a visual picture of my performance in the classroom and an opportunity to view a fellow teacher and get some ideas that can be applied to my methods."

- "The individual becomes more reflective of his or her own methodology and thus more interested in the evaluation process."

This is a teacher-run project. Seven out of nine members of the development team are teachers. Teachers on the development team attended the initial formative evaluation training, developed a new teachers evaluation plan, created and conducted training for other teachers, and managed the evaluation plan at their schools.

Teachers and administrators stated that there were a few minor problems associated with the implementation of the formative plan. At one point, teachers were putting off doing their observations and, as a result, not turning their paperwork in on time. Reported a building administrator, "Administrators will not carry the sticks for this project. It is not our role to remind teachers to complete this plan." Teacher leaders of the project strongly encouraged participating teachers to complete activities associated with the project and to get the paperwork in. Related to this, central office personnel initially failed to recognize the teacher evaluation paperwork and the completed forms were misplaced. Once alerted about the new forms, the problem was solved. Initially, video cameras were in short supply for the filming of classroom lessons. A central office administrator found funding to purchase the needed video cameras.

Teacher concerns about the formative plan varied. One teacher said it was difficult to decide on an area of focus for the classroom observation. In response to this concern, teachers participating in plan will now be given a list of professional growth options at the beginning of each school year. Another teacher mentioned she found it hard to find the time to do the

project. Teachers on the development team recommended choosing a colleague from the same or department because of similar planning periods or videotaping a classroom lesson to save time.

For the upcoming year, there will be more structure to formative evaluation plan. Evaluation materials and a handbook will be provided to teachers during a training session. A teacher portfolio option will be added as an additional formative evaluation method. Permanent approval for the formative plan from the school board will be sought. All of this will be coordinated by the development team. One exciting aspect of the formative plan is that it will be offered in all thirteen schools in the district next year. In addition, a team of teachers at each school will develop and manage the formative plan at their site.

Formative teacher evaluation has been an overwhelming success in Richland School District Two. Said one Richland Two educator, "As a result of the new formative plan, teachers have an increased sense of professionalism, new relationships with colleagues, a more reflective view of teaching, new leadership roles, and improved classroom instruction."

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